

The Adversary by RJ_Pepper

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst and Hurt/Comfort, Bisexual Steve Harrington, Eleven & Jim "Chief" Hopper Parent-Child Relationship, Eventual Romance, F/M, M/M, Other, Protective Dustin Henderson, Steve Harrington Has Nightmares, The Upside Down

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Kali Prasad, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Steve Harrington/Original Male Character(s)

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-01-07

Updated: 2018-01-21

Packaged: 2022-04-20 16:27:27

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 5

Words: 8,663

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Things were beginning to look up for the small town of Hawkins, Indiana... or so it seemed. Another string of incidents slowly flooding the surface, threaten to turn the whole town upside down (again). With a new monster, comes an adventure that almost nobody is prepared for.

1. Upside Right

Author's Note:

What do you write for beginning notes? Check the notes at the bottom when you're done reading this chapter. Hope you enjoy! Leave a comment & share your ideas. (I love to hear them!)

"There are times when all the world's asleep. The questions run too deep. For such a simple man. Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned. I know it sounds absurd, please tell me who I am..." -The Logical Song by Supertramp, 1979

Chapter One: Upside Right

A cold darkness surrounds Steve Harrington as he walks along a path he's unsure of. Shivering and afraid, he slowly presses on. "Nancy! Dustin?!" he calls out desperate for an answer. "Anybody..." he dejectedly trails off to himself. He feels someone, something, following him. With a loud crack, he discovers it isn't far behind anymore and reluctantly turns to face it. A tall shadow with glowing eyes sends him into a paralyzed fear. It extends an arm as if beckoning him to go with it.

"NO!" Steve wakes up screaming from yet another terrible dream. He takes a few deep breaths to calm down, he can feel his heart racing in his chest. The nightmares began after El closed the gate and they've gotten progressively worse since then. It's always the same one about a tall, misty shadow man. He hasn't talked to anyone about it, summing things up to PTSD which he can somehow get over on his own. He's suffered in silence for a whole month now. It hasn't helped that his parents left for Hawaii a week ago, without him. See, they had planned their annual family vacation before Steve had a plate smashed over his head and his face beaten in by Billy Hargrove, which caused a concussion. Even if it wasn't against doctor's orders, he still probably would've opted out of a trip. He needed to stay here in case the kids needed him, in case the upside down somehow

opened up again.

The emptiness of the house never got to him before and he was determined to not let it get to him now. "It's a dream, it can't hurt you man." He says as he stares into the bathroom mirror splashing his face with water. His reflection shows a worn down version of himself. He knows he needs to start sleeping more, but four hours was all he could seem to manage lately. Slowly drudging back to bed he looks over at the wall clock, it's 6:30 a.m. and he already has to start getting ready for another school day.

After parking his BMW in the Hawkins High parking lot, he takes a moment to rest his head on the steering wheel. He thought he could keep doing this, but doubt is making it's merry way into his head. Can holiday break get here any sooner? Just a few more days is all he has to wait.

"Steve?" A voice near the driver side window causes him to nearly jump out of his skin. He sighs in relief when he sees that it's only Nancy. Of course, Jonathan isn't too far behind peering over her shoulder.

"Hey there." He awkwardly scratches the back of his neck. "How's it, going?"

"Are you okay? That's the second time we've seen you passed out in your car." He laughs a little too loud causing her to raise an eyebrow with concern.

"That? I'm fine." He dismisses her concern as he steps out of the car. "House has been empty for a while now and I'm just having trouble sleeping. You know?" She nods in understanding. She bought it, a small mental victory for Steve. Now wouldn't be the right time to explain the true reason for his insomnia. Where would he even start without sounding weak?

"Right, your parents. I'm sorry about that. Nobody should have to spend the holiday's alone." He just shrugs it off like it doesn't bother him at all. He'd prefer if nobody knew about his situation, but of course word gets around in this damned town.

"It's really okay, I'll uh, talk to you guys later." He digs his hands in his pockets and walks toward the crowded entrance, leaving them behind. He hates to admit it, but it's still hard for him to be around Nancy. Especially with Jonathan there. He still has feelings he hasn't completely let go of yet.

The day went by in a blink as he nearly fell asleep in most of his classes and fell completely asleep in Spanish. He only woke up because the teacher tapped his neck with a ruler, causing the whole class to laugh. That would've bothered the old Steve, but he knows better than to sweat the little things now. Hell on Earth exists; high school is nothing. By the end of his last class he actually gained some energy and is feeling good. He's walking down the hall with a smile for the first time in a while when he feels his books get slammed out of his hands. This almost causes him to trip and he glares at the perpetrator.

"Watch where you're going Harrington. I'd hate to mess up that pretty face again." Billy practically spits while continuing in the opposite direction. Steve rolls his eyes and bends over to pick up the books scattered across the floor. This became an every day thing after the whole incident. Even though Steve didn't want to press charges, his parents got one look at his face and demanded that something be done. They chose then of all times to care. Long story short, the least Chief Hopper could do was issue Billy mandated anger management courses. Clearly they aren't working because he's been taking out his aggression on Steve for getting him stuck there on weekends.

Grateful for the lack of basketball practice today, Steve shoves his books into his locker and heads back out into the cold. It's snowing and seems to have snowed four inches since school started. He shivers and blows air over his hands as he turns on the heat in his car. While he waits for it to warm up, he turns up the radio. "When Doves Cry" is playing clearly and then it starts to go static. In confusion he tries changing it, but everything is suddenly static and his ears are ringing. The noise is so unbearable that he covers his ears and cringes. Squinting through the pain he manages to see it. In the distance, about four cars away, is the man. As if floating on a cloud of mist above the snow, the monster from his dreams slowly moves towards him with glowing eyes. Panic hits, he locks the doors, and

quickly puts the car in reverse. A car beeps its horn loudly as he almost backs into it pulling out, but he manages to speed out of the parking lot unscathed.

Breathing heavily, he begins to relax as school disappears behind him and music returns to the radio. He slows down a little and turns the windshield wipers on. The snow is making it hard to see, but in the distance he notices four blobs moving through the snow up ahead. He pulls up beside them slowly and rolls the window down.

"Steve." Dustin nods a hello trying to play it cool.

"Just get in the car you losers." He shakes his head, what were they even thinking in this weather?

"Yes sir." He enthusiastically calls shotgun and races to the passenger seat.

"Yeah, you don't gotta ask me twice." Lucas says hopping in the backseat with a smiling Will in tow. Mike takes a moment longer, but eventually rolls his eyes and joins his friends.

"Do you want to tell me why you guys are attempting to walk home in this?" Dustin went off on a tangent about how they missed the bus because they planned on riding their bikes home, but it snowed more than they thought it would.

"More than YOU, thought it would." Lucas shakes his head. "I told you I heard the weather this morning."

"OH SUE ME."

Steve just listens to all of them blame each other for missing the bus with a smile. The banter makes him feel sane and safe for a moment. He almost forgets that some creature is after him, he was just scared out of his mind and as much as he hates it, he'll actually have to ask for help soon.

2. Book Boy & Shoe Girl

Notes for the Chapter:

I actually started writing this while waiting for an invite to create this account, so I have three chapters done already. I think I'll post those now & then update as often as I can.

"Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride. Nobody gonna slow me down, oh no I got to keep on movin'. Ain't nothin' gonna break-a my stride. I'm running and I won't touch ground. Oh no, I got to keep on movin'..." - Break My Stride by Matthew Wilder, 1983

Chapter 2: Book Boy & Shoe Girl

"Here you are sweet stuff, I'd give it a minute. Don't need to burn your tongue." Ethel places Steve's usual coffee on the counter in front of him. The older woman has worked at Doug's for as long as he can remember. She's like the grandma he always wanted. You know, if you could choose family.

"Thanks." He smiles as warm as the heat radiating off the mug.

"Now, what brings you in here so late?" She puts her hands on her hips and he shakes his head.

"Can't sleep, college applications are really getting to me." This was at least part truth. It's been near impossible for him to think of what he wants to do once he graduates and that stresses him out quite a bit. The truth is, after dropping off the kids, he had driven to the police station. He wanted to tell Hopper everything, but thought about how ridiculous it would sound considering nothing had actually hurt him yet. He sat outside for twenty minutes before just driving home. He distracted himself with homework and T.V. for a while, but when 12 a.m. came around, he just couldn't stand the darkness alone. He needed to get out and decided that his favorite diner would be safe. It's a short drive outside of town, but worth the

trip. Not too many places in Hawkins can compare to it.

"I'm sure you'll get in somewhere. If not, you're young and got your whole life ahead of ya' kiddo. Just keep your head up and promise me you'll get some sleep." She ruffles his hair.

"I'll try, okay?" He laughs and takes a small sip of coffee. He happens to look over her shoulder and notices a guy he's never seen before sitting alone in a booth. He's got to be around his age, but he couldn't be from Hawkins. With a tall slender build, high cheekbones, prominent jawline, wavy shag cut honey hair and porcelain skin; he looks like he just stepped out of some movie or fashion magazine. His round blue eyes are intently focused on the book before him. Is it a school book or something more interesting?

"Why don't you go say hi? He's been reading that book for an hour now, could probably use a break." She squeezes his shoulder before walking away with a few dishes to wash. Steve can feel his face heat up. He hadn't meant to stare and certainly didn't intend on being called out for it. Why was he staring anyway? He hadn't felt this way since the first time he noticed Nancy. It can't be the same feeling though, this isn't a girl. He sighs and tries to drink his coffee faster. On top of everything going on in his life, he didn't need to add confusion to the list. Maybe it's the lack of sleep mixing up his emotions. Yeah, that's what he'll go with. He pulls out his wallet, leaves his money under the mug and hurries to his car without saying goodbye.

Starting the drive back to town fills his mind with questions. Who was he even becoming? Where were the answers that used to come so easily? What if he's going crazy? How does he get himself back to a state of normalcy?

"Keep it together, just keep it together." He says aloud, gripping the steering wheel tighter as he drives on. Before he knows it, he's back in Hawkins. It's got to be about 2:30 a.m. and the streets are eerily empty. A streetlight flickers. "A coincidence." Another one flickers as he drives past. Then another one. "Shit, shit, shit." He's so distracted by the lights that he has to slam on his breaks when he notices a person just standing in the middle of the street. His heart is nearly beating out of his chest at this point. Suddenly, the lights get

so bright that he has to cover his eyes. "WHAT IS HAPPENING?!" The lights explode with a loud pop and the shattered glass falls to the street like rain. He opens his eyes, shocked to see a woman standing there with her arms raised. He tries to take in as much detail as he can in this split second. African American, wild curly hair, short, possibly mid-teens and missing a shoe? She's gone as fast as he can blink. He rubs his eyes a few times. Did that really just happen? Where the fuck did she go? He presses his foot to the gas. He wasn't certain about much anymore, but he knew he couldn't ignore this. He knew where he was going.

He knocks frantically at the door and holds his breath as he hears someone coming. How do his footsteps manage to sound grumpy?

"Look kid, I like you, but there better be a damn good reason you woke me up." Hopper answers the door and stands there with his arms crossed.

"I was driving home, all the street lights on Woodburn just exploded. And-and there was this girl who was just standing in front of my car. I swear she did it somehow, I didn't know where else to go." The chief's eyebrows furrow with concern at his story as annoyance seems to dissipate.

"Okay, that's a pretty good reason. Did you see where she went?" He shakes his head.

"No, I blinked and she was just... gone." He's still shaken up by the whole experience. "I remember exactly what she looked like, maybe we could do a sketch or something."

"In the morning we'll get that done at the station." He looks over Steve and notices how jumpy he is. When was the last time this kid slept? He wondered if something more was eating at him. There was no way he was letting him drive home like this though. "Uh, the couch folds out into a bed. Why don't you stay here til' morning? You look like shit." He thinks about it before deciding that he'd rather stay here than alone in his large dark prison of a house.

"Are you sure? I mean, I can still drive."

"It's fine, come on." Hopper leads him into the house and helps him make a useable bed as quiet as possible. They didn't want to wake up El who was only a couple of rooms away. Within minutes of laying down Steve finds himself falling asleep with no problem. It might be the weirdest thing to happen yet.

Notes for the Chapter:

I just realized that Nancy also has round blue eyes. Also, I wish I had a sweet diner to go to when I can't sleep. It'd be very helpful considering I can't manage to go to bed before 4 a.m. most nights. ANYWAY, chapter 3 coming up!

3. What Happened on Woodburn?

*"Darkness on the edge
Shadows where I stand
I search for the time
On a watch with no hands
I want to see you clearly
Come closer than this
But all I remember
Are the dreams in the mist*

*These dreams go on when I close my eyes
Every second of the night I live another life
These dreams that sleep when it's cold outside
Every moment I'm awake the further I'm away..." - These Dreams by
Heart, 1985*

Chapter 3: What Happened on Woodburn?

The snow outside had stopped falling, but it accumulated to a fair amount upon the ground outside. Dustin Henderson gapes at it from his window and marathon sprints to the small radio on his dresser. He tunes it, trying to get a news station. "Come on, come on!" He eventually finds a station that's listing school closings. He closes his eyes and crosses his fingers.

"Hawkins Elementary, Hawkins Middle..." That's all he needed to hear to break out into a victory cheer.

"YES! SNOWDAY!" He hurriedly changes into some winter gear and darts into the living room, where his mom is just getting done on the phone.

"That was Lucas, your friends are all meeting at Mike's house. Be careful! Love you!" She calls after Dustin as he shoves his coat on.

"Got it! Love you too mom!" He's out the door and halfway down the driveway.

"Wait, Dusty!" His mom calls from the door.

"What?" He groans impatiently. She tosses him a banana which he almost drops in the snow.

"You didn't have any breakfast!" He puts it in his backpack and yells a thanks before trekking off to Mike's house in the snow. His

mother just watches him until she's sure he'll be ok, like any worried mother would.

Eventually he makes it to the Wheeler's place where Mike, Lucas and Will are already waiting in the front yard.

"Dang, how did you get here so fast?" He pants out of breath. Will points to Jonathan's car in the driveway. There's two sleds rigged to the back on a heavy duty rope. "What the hell? And you guys made me walk here?" He knows his house is out of the way, but he would've liked an invitation at least. "No Max?"

"She couldn't get out of family stuff. Apparently, she has cousins visiting for the Holidays from California." Lucas and Dustin start going on about how they'd much rather be at the beach than in the snow.

"Look, we have more important things to worry about right now." Mike says directing the attention towards him. The boys give him a confused look, but they're all listening. "You all heard what happened on Woodburn, right?"

"Yeah, some punks broke a few street lights and the road is closed because they've got to clean up the glass." Dustin answers quickly. "You don't think..."

"There's only one way to figure out. I say we investigate. El didn't answer my calls OR my radio, something is up." Lucas shakes his head at Mike's proposal.

"No, no, no- no way. The upside down is over with. El closed the gate, we all saw the demodogs die, Will isn't seeing monsters anymore. Let's just leave it. She's probably eating some Eggos with Hopper or something." Will takes a deep breath and closes his eyes.

"That's not all true. I- I still see things." Everybody goes silent. "Like, people I don't remember ever seeing before, bad things, random things... I saw those lights explode."

"WAIT? So, you're saying you're like psychic now?!" Dustin thought that nothing could shock him anymore. But his totally human best friend gaining supernatural powers somehow, who's ever ready to hear that?

"How long have you been seeing things? And why didn't you tell us about it?" Mike inquires in a vexatious manner. He is clearly tired of people he trusts hiding big secrets from him.

"Since the gate closed. I didn't mention it because I just thought they were bad dreams. They don't feel like the ones I had before. But, the lights are the only thing that actually happened in real life so far.

I swear I was going to tell you guys today, I was just waiting for the right time." Everybody takes a moment to process this new information.

"What else have you dreamed of?" Dustin asks hesitantly, afraid to know the answer to his question. Will's eyes widen suddenly and his face falls pale, not because of the cold.

"Oh my god, we have to find Steve." He states with panic.

"Harrington?" Will nods and now Dustin is freaking out. "Why the hell do we have to find him? What did you see?"

"He was there, but something bad is going to happen today if my dreams really are true. If I'm right, he's... he's at the police station right now. He'll be leaving soon though, we have to be quick!" All of the boys look at each other and then the car like their minds are working as one. They run into the house as fast as they can.

"NANCY! JONATHAN! There's something really..." Mike stops when he bursts open Nancy's bedroom door only to discover them kissing on her bed. They pull away upon seeing all of the boys in the doorway and there's a moment of awkwardness they all wish they could get back.

"MIKE! What did I tell you about knocking?" Nancy blurts out of habit.

"What's wrong?" Jonathan stands up and looks at them the same way he does when something crazy is going on. Clearly it was serious, they all look like a bomb is about to explode and they have ten seconds to disarm it.

"It's Steve, he's in danger and we don't have time to explain. We need to get to the police station; fast." Upon mention of Steve, Nancy jumps out of the bed quickly with an uneasy expression taking over her face. Too quickly for Jonathan's liking, but now was not the time for jealous feelings. Apparently, they needed to get out of here fast.

Meanwhile at the police station, Steve is just getting done describing the appearance of the shoeless mystery girl. It took a few tries, but the sketch artist finally achieved a picture that closely resembles her. Hopper thought it might be a good idea to see if El might remember anything from the lab, so he snuck her into his office. He's still trying to keep her somewhat a secret. Reluctantly, he has loosened the reins a bit since she proved how powerful she can be on her own. He only wants her to be as safe as possible and learned the hard way that pushing her away would be the complete opposite of that.

"You think she was like me?" She holds the sketch up, examining it closely.

"Maybe. Do you think you might recognize her?" Steve asks in a big brother voice that she somehow brought out. She shakes her head with a sigh. She almost looks relieved that she didn't know the girl.

"Don't remember much. But... I want to help." Steve nods sympathetically.

"Is this her?" Hopper looks up from the files he's been going through. It's a manila envelope labeled *experiment #9*. He slides it over to Steve who carefully removes the contents. A newspaper clipping reads of a child abduction case nearby. Audrey Burns, she's been missing since the age of five. A witness to her disappearance reported that she was last seen entering an unmarked van. She was known at Hawkin's Lab as experiment 009. The picture is a younger version, but definitely the girl. He wouldn't forget that face or the fierce intensity in her eyes. He closes the folder not wanting to possibly see more, already disgusted by it all. Children being kidnapped, tortured, stripped of their childhood and reduced to nameless nothings. This town has always been infested with monsters, just not the supernatural kind.

"It is." Now time to be confused. "Why do you think she'd come back here?" El takes the picture, snatches the bandana she's been staring at from Steve's pocket and hurries over to the tiny antennae T.V. in the corner of the room. "What is she doing?"

"Finding her." Steve just shakes his head astonished. He thought he'd seen it all.

"She can do that?" Hopper just firmly nods in response. The T.V. is static and she appears to be just sitting there, but she's currently exploring another place in her mind. A place that Hopper and Steve can't go. After about a minute she gasps and rips off the blindfold.

"What?" They both ask simultaneously. She looks up at them with wide eyes.

"She saw me. Strong, she has to be strong." She puts her hands on her head, clearly stressed by the current events. "She's still close, by the big lake."

"You mean, the quarry?" Hopper asks and she nods.

"Yes, there." Steve stands up from the chair he was sitting in and pulls his keys from his pocket. He starts for the door with more energy than he's had all week.

"Where are you going kid?" Hopper quickly stands up as well,

following him.

"We're not just going to sit around right? We need to get answers."

"Gonna be hard to get answers in a body bag. We don't know what this girl is capable of or if she's one of the bad guys. We can't just go in guns blazing." Steve tries to relax for a minute and accepts that he's right. They can't just rush this, it wouldn't be safe.

"Okay, I won't check the quarry." He runs a hand through his hair. "I'll go home, get some food and clean up. You promise to tell me when you're ready to find her?" Hopper takes a moment to answer, but he eventually makes up his mind.

"I'm not making any promises; however, it's always good to have back up that can legally drive. And since you're already directly involved, I don't see why you should be left out." Steve isn't one hundred percent sure he believes that Hopper will let him know when things are going down, but all he can do is take his word. He shakes his hand and gives El a nod before leaving the office.

All eyes watch him as he walks through the station. The cold air is like a slap in the face when he opens the door and steps outside. Maybe he should just go anyway. Does he really care if he gets put in harms way? What's the worst that could happen? Death? It might be nice. He's halfway to the sidewalk when a speeding car squeals to a halt in front of the station. He can't believe what he's seeing right now. Nancy, Jonathan and all of the kids (minus Max) are piled in Jonathan's car and they look like something insane just happened. Also, kind of like a clown car. Are they okay? The door bursts open and suddenly they're running frantically at him. Dustin crushes Steve with a hug that nearly knocks him over. He pats his back not knowing how to react.

"You're okay, thank god. We got here in time." Alright, now he's actually scared.

"Why wouldn't I be okay?" Dustin stops hugging him and Steve looks at all of them with bewilderment. "How the hell did you know I was here?"

"Will saw it. In a dream." Lucas' reply doesn't help clear up much for Steve.

"Pardon?"

"Just come with us and you'll be safe. We'll explain it all somewhere... less public." Mike says looking around nervously.

"Okay...we can go back to my place, nobody's there."

"Perfect." Will declares and they all practically drag him towards

the car. Guess the quarry is out, but now what the hell is going on?

Notes for the Chapter:

AND, here's another one. I'll be working on Chapter 4 now, wish me luck. I think it'll be a bit more difficult because I want to get this transition right and I tend to procrastinate alot when writing. BTW... I didn't plan this around the Heart song & I love that the lyrics just weirdly happened to fit.

4. Fair-rington

*“Love kills, drills you through your heart
Love kills, scars you from the start
It's just a living pastime
Ruining your heartline
Stays for a lifetime won't let you go
Cause love (love) love (love) love won't leave you alone...” – Love Kills
by Freddie Mercury, 1984*

Chapter 4: Fair-rington

After calming down the kids, Steve managed to keep them from forcing him into the car; reminding them that he had his own to drive back home. They all made it safely to his house and were now in his living room. Steve is on a backwards dining chair facing a large couch where the four boys sit. Nancy and Jonathan stand behind them anxiously. Nancy nervously pulls at her sweater as the memories from this room come back to her. All the time she spent just listening to music with Steve, laughing with him, watching stupid movies, trying to study and failing to ever get anything done. Happy memories are blurred with regret, she can't seem to shake that this is where she messed everything up. Where she lost Barb. It still haunts her. Jonathan can see her discomfort and uncrosses his arms to take her hand. She smiles up at him feeling slightly better knowing that she has his support.

As quick and simple as it was, this act doesn't go unnoticed by Steve. His heart drops a little, that used to be his job. To keep her happy and safe. He wasn't the best at it in the beginning of their relationship, but that was before he knew all the craziness she had been through. He really thought he was doing better before their blowout. He bought Jonathan a new camera, stayed up with her on nights she couldn't sleep, ditched his asshole friends and all of the other things a good boyfriend should do. Somehow he still managed to fuck it up though. Where did he go wrong? When did it all become *bullshit, bullshit, bullshit*? It wasn't his fault Barb got taken by the demogorgon. Nancy returns her attention to him again and they make eye contact, but he quickly looks back at the rambling group on

the couch. He didn't want her to see the pain in his eyes. Not when he's supposed to be okay with her moving on.

"SO!" Steve starts, diverting his attention back to why they're actually here right now and quieting them down. He really did hate their habit of talking all at once. "How did you guys know where I was?"

"Will has been having weird nightmares since the gate closed. You know the exploding lights on Woodburn? He saw that happen before it happened." Mike's words cause Steve's heart to race, yesterday night still fresh in the back of his mind. Jonathan tenses up at the news regarding his brother, now it's Nancy's turn to give his hand a squeeze.

"What exactly did you see in that dream?" Steve asks.

"I just told-" Mike starts but he raises a hand to shush him.

"Will?" He asks wanting to hear details straight from the source. Will feels his face grow hot with all the attention shifting over to him. He never felt weird about talking around his friends, but for some reason speaking directly to a guy like Steve Harrington made his heart race. He has to concentrate on a leg of the chair to even get the words out properly.

"I was like a bird, looking down at everything. You were in your car and something dark was following it down the road. I wanted to warn you, but I couldn't. The girl who broke the lights saved you from whatever it was. Barely, but she held it off." Part of Steve is relieved that the girl isn't an enemy, another part of him wonders why she saved him. Was he being followed everywhere? Good or bad, it still creeps him out.

"What did the girl look like?" Mike asks concerned.

"There's another El on the loose and you're worried about what she LOOKS like?" Dustin interjects causing Mike to roll his eyes dramatically.

"Just tell me, it's important!"

"She was dark skinned, wild curly hair and had these intense green eyes. I've honestly never seen anyone like her before."

"Okay." Mike sighs as though all worry dropped off his shoulders. Lucas and Dustin share a look that means they'll definitely be asking about this later.

"El is safe by the way. She was at the police station, helping me find the girl he just described. But, uh, that all sounds pretty accurate. It still doesn't answer how you knew where I was today

though.” Steve steers the topic back on track while at the same time answering a question Mike didn't ask, but clearly needed the answer to.

“Right, that was a different dream. I actually dreamt it last night. Once you left the station, I saw...” Will closes his eyes not wanting to relive the violent images. “You went to the quarry for some reason, but you couldn't find what you were looking for. When you started walking back through the woods there was a man... a man with no face & glowing eyes, following you. Nobody stopped him this time.” He was looking up at Steve now because part of him needed to make sure he was actually there and safe. Steve shudders at the idea of the man from his nightmares finally catching up to him in the real world. He decides to keep that little detail to himself. No point in wasting time explaining his nightmares if they already know he's in danger.

“But here I am, I didn't go there. What now?”

“I don't know, I've never tried to change the future before. What I do know is, that creature is strong and for some reason it wants you bad.”

“Great, great.” Steve huffs and throws his hands in the air as he hops out of the chair and starts pacing until it hits him. “You all have to leave me alone. I don't want anyone else to get hurt. It wants me right? Let it have me.” Of course nobody is okay with that plan.

“Steve, you know damn well we're not going to do that.” Dustin is angry at even the thought of it.

“Yeah, are you insane? That thing probably wants to kill you.” Jonathan speaks for the first time since this meeting started. His genuine concern for Steve's safety hits a nerve.

“Really? I thought it might want to take me out to dinner or something.” He deadpans.

“This isn't funny Steve!” Nancy snaps which only annoys him even more somehow.

“What do I care if some monster eats my heart out? Huh? It's not like I haven't been there before.” The words fell out of his mouth and he can't take them back.

“GUYS! I'm sorry to interrupt your soap opera, but I think Steve has a point.” Mike breaks through the mounting tension. “We could lure the thing out and that way we'd be ready to face it. If it's coming regardless, shouldn't we at least try to fight?” Silence fills the room because they all know he's right. Were they ready to fight another powerful being? They barely survived the last one.

“Okay, you're not wrong.” Lucas sighs. “What's the plan?”

“First things first, we're going to need all the power we can get.”

After about twenty minutes of discussion, they have a plan to set in motion.

THE PLAN:

1. Invite El over for “D&D” (*Don't make it suspicious. Hopper can't figure out what they're really doing.*)
2. Find the girl who broke the lights.
3. When it gets dark, let Steve head towards the woods alone. Luring out the mist man.
4. Trail him and fight the monster off when it attacks. Possibly capture, scare it away or weaken it.

The boys spent about ten of those minutes arguing over whether or not to bring Max into this. Lucas made the argument that she'd get worried when nobody calls her later because he promised to and that she deserves to be there as part of the party. Long story short, they're posted at the end of her street and the mission to sneak her out is about to take place. Nancy and Jonathan are out gathering supplies for the big plan. After this, they're all going to regroup at Steve's place right before sundown.

“I swear, I don't know how you convinced me that this was a good idea.” Steve says upon the realization that he's technically going to be kidnapping this girl if they get caught. “Do NOT make me wait here long.”

“If you get attacked while we're gone?” Dustin asks while everyone else is already getting out of the car. Steve holds up the walkie talkie they gave him earlier and rolls his eyes.

“Now go.” He nods before turning to follow the rest of his friends. As soon as Steve sees for sure that all of the boys are far enough away, he puts his head in his hands and groans with frustration. He closes his eyes and tries to relax. Everything lately has been beyond overwhelming. It's a shock to discover monsters exist, another thing entirely being hunted by one. And why did that girl save him? Why did she come back here after getting away from this shit place? Audrey Burns, what did she want from him? Nothing about what happened at Hawkins Lab was right. He wonders about all the others as he sits back in the car seat. How many of them were there? Why children? How many survived and escaped? How many didn't? He tries to find something on the radio to take his mind off of all the

terrible thoughts he can't seem to shake.

After about five minutes of peace and quiet, the noise of a car pulling up next to his is enough to startle him. He'd recognize the sound of that obnoxious Camaro anywhere. Just his luck. He attempts to melt into his seat and disappear, but to no avail. Billy saunters up to Steve's driver side window then begins gently tapping on it. Reluctantly, he rolls the window down.

"Nice weather we've been having. Still haven't gotten used to it yet, huh?" Steve refers to the fact that there's snow on the ground and Billy isn't even close to dressed for it.

"I'm cold blooded Harrington." He flicks a cigarette butt to the ground. "And I see you're still hanging around a bunch of kids lately. People are talking, you know? Not only are they saying you're a fairy, but you like em' young. Maybe Nancy wasn't the only Wheeler you had eyes for."

"Bite me, you asshole. What do you even want?"

"To make sure they're not right. Can't have somebody like that around my baby sister, now can I? What are you doing on my street anyway? Alone." He honestly can't tell if Billy is actually trying to be a good brother for once or if he's just being a dick. Most likely the latter. But even he can agree that this does look kind of suspicious.

"I've been babysitting, okay? Just trying to expand my business. There are other families who live on this street." His lie is weak but it'll have to do for now. "But listen... I- I don't even know why I'm explaining myself to you. You don't even know me."

"You're right, I don't." He blows smoke into Steve's face. "All I'm saying is, you might want to reconsider your gig. Wouldn't want King Steve to get lynched."

"Thanks?" Even after experiencing them daily, he doesn't quite know how to respond to Billy's weird mood swings. One minute he's attacking him and the next he gives him helpful advice. The emotional whiplash would drive anyone crazy. Unstable isn't a strong enough word to describe him.

As if on cue, the kids are running frantically back to the car, but freeze once they notice Billy standing there. He didn't see them so they quickly take cover in some nearby shrubs.

"Don't let me catch you anywhere near my place again or I'll send your ass back to the hospital with more than a concussion. Got it, Fair-rington?"

“Sure.” It takes everything in him not to fight back, but he knows that if the situation escalates the whole day will be a wash. Once Billy gets back in his car and it's completely out of sight, everyone scatters out from the bushes then over to the BMW. “Alright, seat belts on.” Without a moment to collect himself from the encounter he just had, he quickly drives off. Who was Hargrove to call him a damn fairy? He sees the way that guy looks at him in the locker room showers. Maybe that's why he's been obsessed since the day he moved here. He probably wants to hookup, but a guy like that? Not a chance. Where did he get the notion that Steve could possibly be gay anyway? Did he have mixed feelings at the diner? Yes, but nobody does or has to know that. Wait, what would even be the problem if they did? Oh yeah, he lives in Hawkins. A town where anything queer just wouldn't make sense to anyone. Hell, he can't even completely accept the idea of it himself. Why would anyone else? His parents would probably disown him if they knew he even thought about another man in a way that wasn't strictly platonic. What would Nancy think about it? Why does he even still care what she would think?

“Steve?” Dustin's voice brings him back to reality. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, totally.” He pushes aside his thoughts to a place in his mind where they can't distract him. He'll have plenty of time to focus on that when he can't sleep at night. At the moment, he needs to concentrate on finding a girl who can surge electricity with her mind because everything about that is completely more normal than questioning his sexuality.

Notes for the Chapter:

Not exactly happy with this, but I'm going to stop second guessing and post it anyway. Hope you enjoyed! I'll be working on chapter 5 now. (Prepare for things to pick up.) Sidenote: I noticed how the last chapter ended like "Omg Steve's okay!" and this ended like "Steve, are you okay?" I didn't even mean for it to happen like that lmao I kinda love that it did though.

5. Face to Face

“All your life you've been waiting for your chance Where you'll fit into the plan But you're the master of your own destiny So give and take the best that you can...” Fight the Good Fight by Triumph, 1981

Chapter 5: Face to Face

Will hesitates at the edge of the woods as Steve leads the group in with Lucas, Max and Dustin following close behind. Mike puts a comforting hand on his shoulder. “We're all here, nothing is going to hurt you. We wouldn't let it.” Will shivers from the cold creeping up on him. The energy here is off and everything in his body is telling him to turn around.

“Something doesn't feel right. I-I think we shouldn't be here.” Mike can see the fear in Will's eyes. He doesn't doubt that this place gives off an eerie vibe, but what if Will feels scared because he is? Not of the monster, but being sucked back into the upside down.

“Come on! No falling behind this time, I mean it shitheads!” Steve yells from partially inside the woods. Mike looks towards his friends then back at Will.

“We'll be fine. As long as we stick together.” He takes Will's hand without thinking anything of it. Unaware that this causes his friend's heart to skip a beat, not out of fear. His hand is burning, but it's not the numbing cold. “Trust me.” Will nods despite every doubt in his mind. They drop hands and run to catch up with the others. They're halfway through, surrounded by trees when Steve pauses.

“Shhh! Did you guys hear that?” They all listen for any noise. A crunch of leaves from behind causes them all to jump and spin around. A tiny squirrel hops over to a tree then starts to climb.

“Seriously? A squirrel?” Lucas responds, unimpressed by the rodent.

“Son of a bitch Harrington, am I gonna have to lead the party from here?” Dustin teases.

“No, I'm the adult, okay? I just... really thought I heard something.” All of the kids are just staring at him now, mouths gaping. “What?” Will slowly raises a hand to point over Steve's shoulder. They weren't looking at him, they were looking past him. He slowly turns around tightening his grip on the nailed bat he brought along for protection. Looming about a hundred feet away is a tall, dark shadow. Exactly like every nightmare he's ever had. He adjusts the bat to a swinging position as he slowly moves forward. “What do you want from me?” He calls out, desperate for answers. The lack of response makes him feel ridiculous. Did he really expect it to answer? Suddenly, he's stopped dead in his tracks. He can't press forward no matter how hard he tries. The weapon he holds is tossed out of his hands and off to the side by an invisible force. A calm consumes him as he begins walking like a zombie toward the now glowing figure.

“What in the actual hell is that?!” Max exclaims as Lucas grabs her hand, ready to run. They all steadily back up except for Dustin who's moving towards the bat.

“We need to leave, now!” Mike grabs his arm to keep him from going any further. “Don't be stupid, let's go!”

“No, I'm not just going to let him die! Steve! Snap out of it!” Dustin calls out hysterically. With a quick turn of the creature's head, the kids barely have time to gasp before they all fall lifeless to the ground. Steve winces in an effort to break the trance, but there's nothing he can do. The pull is too powerful. It lures him deeper into the woods before coming to an abrupt halt. He stands there now, face to face with the man. Two long, claw like hands wrap around both sides of his head lifting him off the ground. It feels like something is attempting to scratch it's way into his brain. The glowing orbs seem to be hypnotizing, numbing the pain. He's petrified. His vision is going in and out as life leaves his body. He can feel himself giving up, it's like floating. He's never felt more free. He's not afraid.

“MEALTIME'S OVER YA MANKY BASTARD!” The monster is slammed from behind by something. Steve falls to the ground, hard. He can't hear or see anymore. Everything is black.

Speeding down the road with five passed out kids in the backseat of his Camaro is not how Billy intended to spend his first ever snow day. He doesn't care where he's going. Just that it's far, far away from those woods. He's been driving so long that the sun is starting to set. Was any of what just happened real? When he checked his rearview and saw those brats sneaking his sister into Steve's car, he immediately turned around to get to the bottom of it. He wanted to figure out where they were going and why the hell he thought it was okay to lie to him. He's had his suspicions since getting knocked out a while back. He knew that they were up to something weird; however, the horror he witnessed is not at all what he expected to find when he followed them. He wasn't sure what he was going to see, but a glowing creature with the capability to disable five people in a single glance? You can't make that shit up.

And Steve, he just let the thing drag him away. He's mentally kicking himself for not doing more. What could he do anyway? It was either save five lives or die because of one. The choice was obvious even in the heat of the moment. Maybe that's what makes it so frustrating. There was not a single thing he could've done to save him without dying or risking the lives of everyone else. He'd never admit it, but he's grown fond of Steve. He's the only person who isn't intimidated by the tough guy act he puts on. He never backs down in a fight, he respects that. It's part of the reason he messed with him so much. Now he's never going to see that ridiculous hair or cute angry look on his face again. He can feel whatever's left of his cold heart hurting.

The chest tightening pain he's experiencing isn't a new sensation, it's something he's felt only two other times in his life. The first was at eight years old during his mother's funeral. The second time came when his father caught him in bed with Paul Aarons. The real reason that his father decided on relocating their family to live a new "normal" life in Hawkins. *Yeah, so much for that. Is this normal enough for you dad?* Billy thinks to himself laughing. His dad would probably rather his son be an evil soul sucking monster than openly gay.

And Max with a black friend? Wait until he hears about that. The fallout might be worse. He might've been harsh on her and that kid, but it was only to scare them. To spare her the pain of judgement and

abuse. He torments her to keep her out of trouble, he torments her because he doesn't want to be close to anyone. His anger is a shield against human connection, but at the same time it's how he shows that he cares about someone. At least that's what he's been figuring out in those stupid therapy sessions. Of course, now he's thinking about Steve again. *Fuck you Harrington! Fuck you for getting me stuck in those classes and fuck you for making me feel things. I hope you can hear this in the afterlife.*

“W-what's happening...” The weird scrawny kid with floppy brown hair is the first one awake. Billy tries to remember a name he might've heard from Max, but nothing comes to mind. He's actually one he's never seen before. That means a clean slate and slightly less fear.

“Relax, you're safe. I'm Max's... brother, Billy. What's your name?” His words seem to do almost nothing about this kid's distressed expression. He can see right through his words and it doesn't help that he's confused from being knocked out.

“I'm Will.” He hesitantly replies. “Where are we? How did you find us?”

“You guys aren't too great at sneaking around. I followed your car so I could take Max home, where she belongs. It's a damn good thing too or we wouldn't be having this conversation right now. Don't know what kind of satanic shit you do for fun in this town, but that was like nothing I've ever seen.”

“It got him, didn't it?” Will asks numbly. He already knows the answer, but needs to hear it confirmed.

“Oh, Harrington? He's gone. Whatever you were looking for definitely had him. That's why I couldn't just leave you runts behind and I didn't know where to go from there, so here we are. What the hell was that anyway?” He taps on the steering wheel trying to hold back from being too aggressive with this poor kid.

“Thank you... for saving us.” He pauses not knowing how to answer his last question without telling him the whole story from the start.

“Look, I need to know what happened back there. I'm not asking, I'm telling you to answer the question.” Billy expresses slightly annoyed by Will's attempt at evasion.

“You want to know the truth about what you saw, I get it.” He sighs. “First, you need to go to this address. My brother is there and expecting us soon. I'll tell you what you need to know when we get there. Believe me, It's a long story.” He pulls a small piece of paper from his jacket pocket and hands it up to him. It's harder in the dark, but he manages to read it.

“Fancy part of town, huh? Well, alright.” He says recognizing the street as being in one of the better areas. He quickly turns the car around to head in the proper direction. Will just nods and looks over at his friends. They're okay, not a single scratch. His mind fills with the images of Steve in the woods. How he couldn't control his actions or put up a fight. He remembers feeling that helpless. Guilt washes over him as he remembers having a bad feeling and still moving forward. What if he would've spoke up, stood his ground? Would it have made a difference? This is all his fault. The upside down follows him everywhere. When will it stop? When he's completely broken? When he loses everyone close to him? He closes his eyes and starts singing to himself to drown out the bad thoughts. All he wants is for the pain to end.

Notes for the Chapter:

Not a perfect chapter, but it's a necessary step for the storyline progression. You learn a little more about Billy. I hope it's clear that I'm not going to completely change him, but the anger management is making him think about maybe being a better person or at least dealing with his issues. Anyway, the story should really start to open up in the next chapter. Get ready for some new character introductions!

Author's Note:

SO... this is the first time I've written in forever. I decided that I wanted to start again and I adore

Stranger Things, so what better way? I hope you like this story as it progresses! I actually looked into D&D for the ideas I have later on, so I'm excited to keep writing. ALSO, I want to build relationships at least semi-realistically so... it'll be a bit before any hooking up or whatever. I promise I'll get to it though, just stay with me lmao